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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to help the reading teacher identify some contrasting elements between the ideal world of reading and the actual world of reading, teacher reading, and the teaching of reading. The author explores the paradoxes in these areas by contrasting ideal reading behavior based on cultural expectations to reality, using normative reading behavior. The paper consists of three sections: reading and the cultural milieu, teachers and reading, and the reading class. The two major themes emphasized are that (1) reading is intricately involved with the culture and (2) reading is strongly associated with normative ideas of "should" and "ought." A bibliography is included. Also attached is Howard Klein's critical reaction to the paper and the author's rejoinder. (AW)

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THE IDEAL WORLD AND THE REAL WORLD OF READING : AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

BY HARRY F. WOLCOTT

WITH A RESPONSE BY HOWARD KLEIN AND A REJOINDER BY DR. WOLCOTT

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AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE
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A RESPONSE
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A REJOINDER
by Dr. Wolcott

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading
200 Pine Hall
Indiana University
Bloomington, Indiana 47401

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INTRODUCTION

Anthropologists make an important distinction between two aspects of culture--the real world of actual behavior, how people do act, and the ideal world of normative behavior, how people say they ought to act. Neither world is in fact less real than the other. The kind of sharing of behaviors and expectations which comprises the way of life of a group of people--their culture--depends as much on shared notions of what ought to be as on shared expectations of responses to specific actions. At the same time, in every culture there are paradoxes between the real and the ideal. These paradoxes themselves are of varying degrees, now humorous or mildly ironical, now presenting the individual with important alternatives, now providing him with options that find him behaving in ways antithetical to the very ideals he is trying to realize, now leading to intrapsychic or interpersonal conflict which may lead to serious and disruptive cultural strain.

The cultural anthropologist, providing what Clyde Kluckhohn referred to as a "mirror for man," seeks to provide man with a way of looking at his own behavior so that he may better understand it. As an observer of human behavior, and typically as an outsider to the group he is studying, the anthropologist often provides a service in helping to identify paradoxes in a given cultural system. His purposes in studying any cultural behavior are to describe and to analyze it. His research is not usually focused on the paradoxes or discrepancies between the real and ideal in a cultural system, but neither does he ignore the inevitable differences once they have been identified. No group of humans has ever worked out perfectly integrated patterns of behavior where there is no conflict or strain, where there is only one course of action possible in every conceivable social situation, and where real and ideal behavior correspond perfectly.

The purpose of this paper is to help the teacher of reading identify some contrasting elements between the ideal world of reading--some of reading's "shoulds and oughts"--and the actual world of reading, teacher reading, and the teaching of reading.

Our reading society

Ideally Americans think of themselves not only as a highly literate nation of people who can read but also as a nation of people who do read. Indeed, Americans probably think of theirs as the greatest reading nation in the world.

In reality, Americans read much less than the image that most people have of ours as a reading society. Opinion polls, national surveys, and research studies provide us with a potpourri of data that hint at the actual amount of reading which Americans do:

> Roper, in 1950, found 18 percent of adults who claimed to be currently reading a book of any kind, even a cookbook. . . . Another 18 percent said they had never read a book that was not required for school or business.[1]
>
> Gallup, in the same year, 1950, found 21 percent of respondents currently reading a book--a fairly good correlation with Roper. By 1957, however, the Gallup percentage had dropped to 17.[2]
>
> In 1955, Gallup found that 61 percent of U.S. adults had not read any book, at least except the Bible, during the previous year.[3]
>
> How often do people read books which they feel will advance their knowledge or education in some way? 46% of a national sample said "rarely" or "never," 29% said "occasionally," and 22% said "frequently."[4]
>
> Among college graduates 44% in one survey responded that they read edifying books "frequently," leaving the majority of college-educated people reading to learn only infrequently once they leave academia.[5]

> A survey of the reading habits of a large sample of urban women showed that 57.6% had not read a book within the previous year; 39.3% had not read a book within the previous two years.[6]
>
> Comparative surveys [of national reading habits] show Britons reading three times as many books per person as Americans, Germans and Australians twice as many, Canadians almost twice as many.[7]
>
> All of the surveys for the last 30 years showed roughly only one American adult out of five currently reading a book.[8]

Data such as these are indicative of national reading habits, but they cannot be taken as definitive evidence. At least two problems arise in gathering and using questionnaires and interviews to get an accurate description of the actual reading practices of Americans. First, "reading a book" does not have a shared meaning; a "book" may mean a best-seller to one respondent, a cookbook to a second, and perhaps a magazine to another. Thus with such cautious reporting as "reading a book <u>of any kind</u>, even a cookbook" as found in the first example above, the reported percent of book readers may be greatly inflated if we want to generalize about voluntary adult reading. Second, there is a phenomenon in survey research known as "overreporting," the tendency of interviewees to provide socially acceptable answers designed to give an interviewer the answers that they think he wants to hear, or to give answers which enhance the self-image of the interviewees. Following an election, sociologists find that people tend to overreport the extent of their voting and their accuracy in voting on the side of the winning candidate or issue. In a society with strong norms suggesting we <u>should</u> read, we can suspect a tendency toward overreporting when people describe their own behavior regarding this activity. An interesting case of overreporting in reading was recently described by Krutch:

> Not long ago the magazine <u>Printer's Ink</u> innocently asked a group of human guinea pigs to name the magazines they read regularly and an astonishing 8 percent of the responses named <u>Collier's</u>--which had suspended publication several years before the question was asked.[9]

Since Americans subscribe so thoroughly to the <u>ideal</u> of reading, obtaining reliable information about their actual reading is exceedingly difficult. The attempts to get accurate data, at least through interview techniques, are confounded by powerful norms which lead many people to report their own reading habits in the most favorable light.

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The need to read

Ideally, we think of reading not only as a form of behavior in which people may engage but as a skill essential to gainful employment. One must not only be able to read, he must read in order to achieve.

In reality, the ability to read, while assumed to be a prerequisite for most jobs, is but cursorily checked by the incidental technique of having an applicant fill out routine forms for accounting purposes. Only occasionally is reading comprehension evaluated by a standardized test as a condition of employment, although such testing does occur and may be found in contrasting settings such as in the corporation personnel office or at the mass induction centers for the armed services. But the level of reading skill actually required by most jobs is minimal. There are few positions where an employee will spend much time reading during his working hours, even if reading is essential to the work.

Few jobs allow an employee to read while at work. Those jobs which do, such as night clerks or night watchmen, usually are advertised as especially appropriate for students and are typically low paying. Most on-the-job reading is of a covert nature. Witness the pocketbook hidden in the top drawer of the secretary's desk. Even for those occupations where reading is associated with the work--as for example a college professor--the reading done on-the-job is done in privacy and often in some secrecy, with the suspicion that anyone caught reading has nothing better to do.

Perhaps because we associate reading with leisure, it is difficult to ascertain what constitutes sufficient diligence on the part of an employee for whom reading is the work for which he receives compensation. How many hours of reading are equivalent to eight hours of work? The measure of productivity cannot come from the reading itself, but must be related to some subsequent measurable activity of the reader, such as the number of pages of summaries written or the number of different articles reviewed. Even when reading is a prerequisite skill for employment, the employee is seldom expected to do much of it on the job. If a new employee is given a handbook of instructions about his position, the chances are he will be told, "Here's a little handbook we've prepared to answer most of the questions that come up in this office. Take it home tonight and look at it." Those whose work involves working with printed material, such as typists or proofreaders, frequently claim or even boast that they do not read the material; they only work with the mechanics of it.

The virtue of reading

Ideally, reading connotes not only the psychological and physiological aspects of the act, but also a degree of quality or appropriateness in

the content being read. Thus, if we are caught looking at a pulp magazine, a comic, or some comparable material not suited for our age or station, we are inclined to respond with, "Oh, I'm not really reading."

In reality, if we are going to take the perspective of the behavioral scientist, we will want to know what people actually read and how they learn to distinguish socially acceptable from socially unacceptable reading. What are the criteria by which the same reading matter (the Reader's Digest probably representing the most frequently cited case in point) is the epitome of literary experience for some people while it is the object of disdain for others? What is the social meaning when a person who is reading by behavioral definitions responds that he is not reading according to his own? Similarly, what is one person saying to another about the normative aspects of reading when he comments to another, "Do you call that reading?" And where did he acquire the norms which are reflected in his comment?

The maintenance of standards in reading is effected through positive and negative sanctions ranging from the informal interpersonal level to the actions of highly organized pressure groups. Positive sanctions run the gamut from personal recommendations of a friend ("I kept thinking as I read this book how much you would appreciate it.") to national and international recognition given to successful authors. Negative sanctions of the interpersonal variety range from the advice of a friend ("Don't bother--it isn't worth reading.") to forceful removal, as when a parent takes a book away from a child and forbids him to read it. In institutionalized form, negative sanctions may range from the deprecating comments of the professional reviewer (for example: "[This latest book] is unworthy of _____'s talent, which, at other moments has been great."), to restricting the circulation of certain books by librarians acting as self-appointed guardians of our moral ethic, to blanket political or ecclesiastical condemnation, and ultimately to maximum sanctions like censorship, book banning, and book burning. The paradox of cencorship, of course, is that the judgment about the effect of the content is always made on behalf of a potential reader for whom, the censor assumes, the reading of the same material will have an effect totally opposite to the one it had on him.[10]

The motivations behind book censorship are complex. Studies of censorship suggest that the targets upon which censors take their aim--specific passages in specific books--are only whipping boys for broader anxieties, whether they be general social problems or specific personal concerns. Coleman, for example, describing an instance of community conflict, observed, "In Scarsdale, the school's critics began by attacking books in the school library; soon they focused on the whole educational philosophy."[11]

At least one assumption underlying censorship is germane here--does reading cause misbehavior, deviance, or delinquency? Conversely--but somehow

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not usually asked--does reading "good" literature cause good behavior? Evidence and intuition both suggest that what people choose to read reflects rather than creates their personalities. Merryman has argued that those who favor censorship have reversed cause and effect, confusing the fact that the selections people make in reading are a reflection of their personalities, not the cause of them:

> The fact that sex maniacs read pornography does not mean that they became what they are because of their reading, but that their reading became what it is because of them. . . . Reading does not create the appetite, it feeds it, whether the reader be sex criminal or compulsive censor.[12]

"What censor, what activist in the cause of increased governmental control of dirty books," asks Merryman, "after steeping himself in obscenity in the line of duty, has consequently become a sex criminal?" (p.15). Whether the "bad guys" read the "bad literature" is not easily proved. In a comparison of the reading habits of 39 institutionalized delinquent adolescent boys and a matched number of nondelinquents, Berninghausen and Faunce[13] found no difference in the number of books either group claimed to have read, and while the delinquents claimed to have read more books judged "adult," they had not read more books judged "sensational." Consistent with other studies of juvenile delinquents, more of the nondelinquent boys had read the books on the investigators' lists; those who get into trouble are simply less inclined to read than those who do not become delinquent.[14]

In quite a different study--an investigation of the reading habits of 1,722 women--the researcher concluded that social integration, defined as "having many active personal relationships with people outside one's immediate family," encouraged and sustained regular reading; women who were lonely were more apt to abandon books: "Books mean little to most lonely people because books do not alleviate loneliness or the intense preoccupation with it."[15] Thus it may be that <u>whether</u> people choose to read, rather than <u>what</u> they choose to read, reflects forms of adjustment; reading is an activity more likely to be chosen by people not completely caught up in working out their own problems. For those people whose lives do include the reading habit, the evidence suggests that their reading reflects what they are rather than makes them what they are.

<u>The influence of reading on American culture</u>

<u>Ideally</u>, devotees of reading and those with vested interests in it often describe reading as a path to improvement and progress, both individually and culturally. Our American culture has achieved what it has because of reading, we are told, and the way to further progress is through more reading. Reading makes and improves the culture. In this

vein we honor our authors, observe national weeks of recognition of books and libraries, and worry whether or not today's young people do enough of the "right" reading.

In reality, reading is influenced by culture far more than culture is influenced by reading. Reading is a cultural phenomenon. The single most important cultural aspect of reading is the relationship between language and culture, but our culture pervades our reading in myriad other ways.

Language is the most symbolic aspect of culture. The ability to develop and use symbolic language is the critical attribute that distinguishes man from other animals. The linguists have held a classic dialogue concerning both the relationship of language to culture and the extent to which the language a person learns provides him not only with a grammar for communicating, but also a grammar for determining how he perceives and how he organizes his experiences. A printed language represents yet another level of abstraction in which sounds are represented by written symbols. How we organize these symbols into the class of objects which we refer to as books reflects our cultural traditions regarding color, shape, the appropriate size of pages and of books, the presentation of symbols from left to right and from front to back, and so on. Similarly, the content of books--the range of appropriate topics for printed media, different expectations of different audiences, characteristic ways of creating material or unfolding a story--also reflects cultural patterns, and fortunate is the author or publisher who successfully arranges the components in a way that meets with wide approval either for satisfying existing norms or, if the timing is right, for providing a minor variation within the tolerated limits of innovation. Furthermore, we see cultural patterns reflected in the production, distribution, use, and possession of books--a major research effort could be devoted to writing an ethnography of reading: who reads what books, when, where, and under what circumstances? What cultural patterns, for example, help to explain how we find more book readers among the young (ages 20-34) but heavier book ownership at a later age (ages 35-55)?[16]

Not only do the form and content of our written literature represent artifacts of our material culture, the cultural values which pervade our lives in American society also are reflected in our books and our reading patterns. Our technology encourages volume production and low costs, and within the publishing industry in recent years we have witnessed a "paperback revolution." Books have become nonprecious, expendable commodities, like automobiles or razor blades. A person's decision to read a book may depend solely on whether or not he can purchase his own inexpensive copy. So, too, American pragmatism is reflected in a whole new genre of literature, the how-to-do-it book. How-to-do-it books reflect contemporary American values and shifting

patterns of time-use in which people have time to pursue nonvocational interests. However, it is not how-to-do-it books that have made Americans pragmatic.

In all cultures there are divisions of labor between men and women; certain activities and interests come to be identified as masculine or feminine, while others are not dichotomized by gender. Again, American reading tastes reflect real differences in cultural patterns, and we find magazines and books addressed to the interests of one sex or the other. Editors of magazines and newspapers directed to the broadest public audience pay close attention to a balance of material of known appeal to each sex, assuring international news, sports, politics, and business coverage for the male reader, balanced with personal local news, fashions, arts and literature, and household management for the female reader. Once again, it is not what the individual chooses to read that determines his sex, nor would it seem that the availability of magazines addressed primarily to a male or female audience is threatening to the opposite sex.

One final example can be drawn to illustrate how a dominant theme in American society has its counterpart in attitudes about reading. The theme is speed. Several years ago the anthropologist Jules Henry noted how "speed, speed, SPEED in learning is the constant lash of teachers, students, and parents."[17] He observed:

> If one were to ask, "What's the hurry?" the answer might be, "Because kids have to get on to the next thing, and the next, and the next. There are so many things to learn, and . . . speed itself is a cultural value . . . .

The emphasis on efficiency and speed has not diminished in the decade since Henry's observations. In the field of reading, speed has been institutionalized. The yellow pages of my telephone directory refer me to Reading Improvement Schools, and advertisements in the newspaper cajole me to read more by reading faster, assuring me that my degree of comprehension will be retained (and may be improved) while my reading rate increases perhaps five to ten times. Our local newspaper ran a feature article on a recent high school graduate who purportedly attained a rate of 25,000 words per minute. Philosophical arguments over the need for faster reading cannot obscure the fact that faster reading is a skill sought by enough Americans to develop a new market for the reading industry. And for those who would blend their valuing of speed with some of the other cultural values reflected in reading described above (do-it-yourself pragmatism, volume production, owning a book as a prerequisite to reading it), there are at least half a dozen inexpensive paperback books available so one can teach himself to be a rapid reader.

Reading reflects culture.

TEACHERS AND READING

In the preceding sections we have explored how reading is part of our cultural milieu and how reading reflects culture in a variety of ways. Here we discuss teachers and reading, as we continue to look for the paradoxes between ideal and real behavior and conjecture on strains that arise from these paradoxes.

Teachers as readers

Ideally, we could probably find consensus that teachers ought to be readers. If any occupation ought to be up on its reading, it should be teaching.

In reality, with any group as large as teachers, there are those who read avidly and those who read little. From my experiences in talking and working with teachers it appears that as a group they share self-expectations that they should read a lot more than they do, that they should read faster than they do, that they ought to do some reading every day, and that some day they hope or plan to read many important books which they have not yet read.

To illustrate the normative aspects of reading to elementary school teachers and principals, I conducted some instant research among the participants at two NDEA Summer Reading Institutes (University of Oregon, 1966, 1967) by asking them to respond anonymously to a brief questionnaire before we began a discussion of the cultural context of reading. The percent of positive responses of ninety-six teachers and administrators to five normative statements about reading are:

1)	There are many important books I have not yet read which I hope and plan to read some day.	99% agree
2)	A person ought to do some reading every day.	86% agree
3)	I ought to read a lot more than I do.	78% agree
4)	I ought to read faster than I do.	71% agree
5)	If I had more time I would read more.	67% agree

The extent of agreement about these statements suggests at least two points about teacher reading: 1) teachers have internalized cultural norms about reading and 2) teachers' own estimates of their reading indicate that it does not measure up to these expectations. To delve further into the reading habits of teachers, I asked the respondents of my questionnaire whether they had read any of the current ten best sellers (the five fiction and five nonfiction titles given in the Sunday newspaper) or were able to name them. Twelve of the same 96 teachers and principals had read one or more current best sellers. An additional 9 persons could name one or more of them but had not read any. To the extent that not doing as much reading as they feel they should do produces dissonance and intrapersonal conflict, teachers, like everyone under similar circumstances, may look for alternative ways to reduce the dissonance. One teacher in response to my brief questionnaire wrote: "I read Reader's Digest condensed materials. You can cover many that way." Another of my respondents who was not able to name any current or recent best seller (46 percent did not) apparently felt compelled to comment, and in the space provided for listing books he wrote, "Sorry! Shame on me."

A colleague whose field is the preparation of teachers of high school English has confessed that when he enters a college bookstore and witnesses the constantly increasing number of books on the shelves, he "breaks into a cold sweat" in an internal conflict of recognizing the necessity of keeping up and the impossibility of ever doing so. There is another way to reduce the should read-don't read gap--transfer the pressure for reading from teacher to pupil. My teacher and principal respondents were almost unanimous in their agreement (95 percent marked "agree") with the statement, "I wish I could get my pupils to read more." Curiously, while most of these educators (about 4 out of 5) indicated that they feel they should read more than they do, they exhibited almost unanimous agreement in wishing that they could encourage their students to read more. One other way to assuage one's reading conscience--albeit a limited one--is to conduct research studies and write about the real world of reading and thus prove to oneself that other people aren't reading as much as they should (either).

Obtaining data on the actual reading practices of teachers, at least through techniques of survey research, is subject to the same limitations as obtaining data on the reading habits of the public at large (particularly in defining what constitutes a book, what "reading" a book means) and with the ever-present problem of overreporting. Catching teachers at overreporting has delighted more than one observer:

> With malice aforethought, another researcher put a number of fictitious titles in a list of books, and then asked a group of high school history teachers to check the names of those

they had recently read. Some of the non-existent books turned out to be prime favorites.[18]

The reporting of the results of a large-scale national survey[19] among teachers of kindergarten through grade twelve provides both an illustration of probable overreporting and a case in which results were presented in such a way that they created the best possible image of teachers as readers. Careful sampling techniques were used in the survey to select a teacher sample representative of the teaching population in general, and an excellent rate of return (87.2%) consisting of responses from 1,372 teachers was obtained. Included in the questionnaire were two questions: "How many professional books of various types (including textbooks) have you read in the last three months?" and "How many non-professional books of various types have you read in the last three months?" A three-page summary of the results[20] which appeared prior to the publication of the complete report stated that during the last three months "typical teachers" had read four popular books and, during the same period, they had also read four professional books. Employing a moment's arithmetic we are led to the startling conclusion that the "typical" American teacher is reading 32 books a year!

For the skeptic who doubts that the typical teacher does such extensive reading, let us examine the kinds of overreporting that contributed to these results. First, we can suspect that the teacher respondents tended to report the extent of their reading favorably. Second, by comparing the full report with the brief summary of it, we also find that the researchers treated their results in a way which presented teachers in their most flattering light as readers. With even the least acquaintance with statistical procedures one is aware that the reference to "typical teachers" could refer to the arithmetic mean, the median, or the modal response. For both professional and popular reading, the research summary stated the highest, and thus most favorable, of the three ways of describing an average. Any of the "averages" in the following table might have been selected to indicate the number of books which teachers reported they had read in the previous three months:[21]

	Mean	Median	Mode
Nonprofessional books read	4.2	2	0
Professional books read	4.1	3	2

Further, the brief summary does not indicate that professional reading as defined in the original questionnaire included the reading of textbooks. Thus it would have been equally honest for the summary report to have stated that during the past three months the typical teacher (as described by the mode) had read no popular books and only two professional books, both of which might have been classroom texts. It is highly unlikely, however, that such a statement would be made by a national educational organization committed to improving the public image of

the school teacher. The treatment of the findings reveals, implicitly, the importance of creating an image of the teacher as a reader.

Teacher preferences in reading

Ideally, teachers should exhibit the highest standards in their own reading choices.

In reality, it appears that teacher reading does not reflect what is considered the best in American literary taste. Although a discussion of identifying acceptable criteria for literary standards is outside the behavioral science perspective of this chapter, it is probably accurate to say of the cultural (in the aesthetic sense) and intellectual activities of teachers generally that they do not set the pace for upgrading taste. Instead, teacher preferences reflect the preferences of the dominant middle class.

According to the national survey of the reading and recreational interests of teachers cited earlier,[22] the two most widely read magazines of the mid-sixties were Reader's Digest and Life, reportedly read by 66 percent and 62 percent, respectively, of all teachers. Thus, the magazine of greatest readership among teachers was the magazine reported to have the largest national circulation. The proportion of women teachers reading the Reader's Digest was slightly larger than the proportion of men teachers; male teachers were slightly more inclined to read Life than female teachers. The readership among teachers for both magazines exceeded 60 percent; the percentage of teacher readers for the next most widely read magazine, Look, dropped to 44 percent, followed closely by Better Homes and Gardens, Saturday Evening Post, Newsweek, and Time. Of these top seven magazines, only Better Homes and Gardens showed a marked readership contrast between female teachers (51 percent) and male teachers (27 percent).

An editorial in one professional educational journal chastising its own (predominantly male) readership among teachers for letting the Reader's Digest capture the teacher audience, yet attempting to find some solace in the fact that fewer male teachers than female teachers read it, commented:

> We take some comfort in the fact that fewer men than women [teachers] follow the often fatuous Reader's Digest (58.5 versus 69.9 percent), but these percentages are depressingly high, unless both sexes read Reader's Digest only for the jokes.[25]

Teachers as reading models for pupils

Ideally, teachers serve as models of reading adults for their pupils. Thus, even a child from a home where the parents do not read has an opportunity to identify with adults who do read through his association with teachers.

In reality, the assumption that teachers serve as models for reading behavior is an unexamined one, and the question appears rather complex. Consider the following three observations, each related to the problem of teachers as models of reading and yet each observation seeming to pull us in a different direction:

1) Pupils have no opportunity to see teachers engaged in typical adult reading. The very presence of the pupils and the purposes for which they are in the classroom virtually preclude any opportunity for teachers to read anything other than materials immediately and directly related to instruction.

2) To the extent that pupils identify with their teachers and identify what teachers teach with who does the teaching, reading skills, like any of the skills taught in elementary school, may be associated with feminine behavior because the setting in which the skills are taught is a predominantly female one (roughly 85 percent of the teachers in elementary schools are women).[24]

3) Although teachers have literally no opportunity to do adult reading during their at-school hours (point #1), and though we may hope that male pupils do not identify the skills they learn with the predominantly female setting in which they learn them (point #2), at least one reference suggests a relationship between teacher reading habits and pupils' success in reading. Martin Mayer makes the following observation in The Schools:

> Back in the 1930's, a New York Board of Regents study of effectiveness in teaching reading found no correlation between children's success (as measured by tests) and the training acquired or methods employed by their teachers--but there was a close correlation between how well the children read and how many books the teacher said she had read outside the classroom during the preceding year.[25]

To whatever extent these three considerations are relevant to the reading process and are related to each other and to comparable beliefs

(e.g., that children from homes where parents read are more apt to be readers), adult attitudes toward reading may influence children, and the influence of teacher reading on pupils may be subtle but nonetheless significant. An inquiry into attitudes about reading might reveal that we confront the child with a range of attitudes and hope the "good" attitudes will rub off, so that, for example, although teachers never engage in adult reading in the presence of their pupils, children still learn to enjoy reading from associating with teachers who enjoy it. At the same time, "bad" attitudes--for example, that some teachers do not enjoy reading or that reading may be perceived as an effeminite pastime because of the predominantly female setting in which it is taught--are expected to have no negative effect.

If educators have not customarily looked very analytically at the attitudes which surround the teaching of reading--or at the cultural milieu in which it occurs--they most certainly have addressed themselves at length to the teacher's instructional role concerning the skills of reading. Let us now look at the teacher as an expert in the teaching of reading.

Teachers as reading experts

Ideally, we like to think of those teachers whose work includes the teaching of reading as professionals possessing a thorough, specialized body of knowledge regarding this area of instruction. There are, as we shall see, some very real limitations in attempting to achieve this ideal.

Various aspects of the teaching of reading contribute to the idealized image of the teacher of reading. Parents, for example, seldom have specific and accurate information about what goes on in classrooms, yet they share a long tradition when they attribute their child's reading progress to the competence of his teacher. Adults have forgotten how they themselves became readers and, lacking evidence to the contrary, they regard their reading ability as a cumulative result of their early schooling. Not infrequently adults reminisce on those good old days in a moralizing tone to today's pupils: "Why, reading used to be my favorite subject in school."

The ideal of achieving expertise in reading is further supported by the existence of a formal body of literature about the teaching of reading, by a proliferation of courses at the university level in the methodology and special problems of teaching reading, and by the presence of specialists who make reading instruction their life work. The field of reading has its own journals, its own professional associations, and its own high priests. To someone outside the reading establishment, these aspects of reading are known about rather than known, but together they serve to reinforce faith in the efficacy of the experts and in the knowledge

base from which they work. For the aspiring teacher, initiation into the role of reading teacher further reinforces a belief in the existence and power of a specific body of ritual knowledge and performance. At least as long as instruction in how to teach reading remains at the theoretical stage, a teacher-to-be may feel that he really is mastering the way to teach reading--or at least that a definitive body of research literature on reading does exist. Consider the high state of knowledge about reading instruction implied in the following questions taken from a test given to students enrolled in a university level course on the teaching of reading in the elementary school:

1) Name the five word attack skills and follow each with an adequate illustration.

2) Name the fourteen steps in proper order for the teaching of skills as listed by Dolch.

3) Give three reasons why consonants should be taught before vowels.

4) What purposes do word attack skills serve? How many should be used?[26]

5) Why is "sounding out words" not reading?

6) Should sounds be learned first or words? Defend your answer.

In reality, the teaching of reading combines a disparate mixture of art and science based heavily on tradition, seasoned with a constantly changing complement of mildly innovative devices, served in an aura of crucial significance, and almost guaranteed by the fortuitious element of maturity. Children today spend so long in school that the majority who do learn to read may do so as a result of sheer exposure rather than as a result of instruction.[27] Our question here is: Do children learn to read because of the skill of their reading teacher, with the assistance of that skill, or in spite of it?

Let us briefly examine this latter possibility--that children learn to read, for the most part, independently of the instructional activities of their teachers. It is introduced here as a distinctly plausible alternative because no one, as far as I know, has answered a related question: Could we ever prevent a child who wanted to read from learning to do so?

Suppose, for purposes of discussion, we entertain the idea that the process of learning to read is far more independent of our efforts at instruction than we have realized. Let us then compare the role of the

reading teacher with some other culturally assigned role for which desired consequences are independent of the role performance believed to cause them. We recognize in all cultures certain behaviors and roles which are associated with and believed able to influence important consequences; although, we usually find it easier to identify such behaviors and roles in other cultures (couvade, shamanistic curing, rain dancing) rather than in our own (observing superstitions, praying for the sick). For purposes of analogy, let us explore a comparison between the reading teacher and a rain dancer. What insight do we have about human behavior under circumstances where highly desirable outcomes, like getting a needed rainfall or acquiring the ability to read, may occur quite independently from our immediate efforts to produce them?

In this analogy, we assume the same seriousness of purpose for the rain dancer and the reading teacher. Although each deals with a phenomenon we are here considering to be outside of his control, neither entertains the possibility that his efforts, when properly executed, do not effect a significant influence. The rain dancer carefully repeats every part of his traditional performance exactly the way it was taught to him--to neglect any one aspect is to invite failure based on the possibility that this was the crucial gesture, the right thought, the essential sequence, or the proper timing of the performance. It worked last time; it will work again. When an apprentice is to learn the dance, he must learn it perfectly, for who can say which element can be ignored or slighted in the total ritual as it has traditionally been performed. Like the rain dancer, the reading teacher solemnly performs a complicated ritual, introducing skills and drills in a traditional sequence. This is how I taught reading last year. My pupils learned to read. Therefore, this is how I am teaching reading this year. Future performers of the ritual, student teachers, are carefully instructed and their apprenticeship is closely supervised to assure their mastery of the practices essential to the ceremony.

Apparently there is no single best method for teaching reading, there is no guaranteed approach or foolproof set of materials. When teachers are called upon to explain (or defend) their own classroom approach, they invariably rationalize their instructional procedure because of its lack of dependence on any one approach. Like the rain dancer, the reading teacher recognizes a host of elements that are potential contributors to the total performance, and each receives its due. "New" methods are often only shifts in emphasis as we become excited over the potential of certain aspects of the ritual (e.g., phonics) to the neglect of others (e.g., sight words).

Why are nonreaders such a threat to teachers? If we continue to explore the position that learning to read may occur independently of teacher effort, we can speculate that nonreaders threaten teachers because teachers are not able to do much for them. If teachers actually

had the expertise they are purported to have or wish they had, then they could help. As it is, the existence of nonreaders suggests a lack of teacher expertise (just as an extended drought may lead to suspicion about the effectiveness of the rain dancer). The success of teachers of remedial reading would seem to controvert this point except for the fact that some remedial teachers using the "worst" methods have been known to get good results anyway, an indication that social factors, like the change of setting or increased personal attention, may be more critical than the techniques employed.

Instead of maintaining the generally accepted idea that teachers can teach children about reading, our exploration of learning to read as a phenomenon relatively independent of instruction might lead us ultimately to hold that reading teaches teachers about children. It is the child's presentation of himself as a reader which provides the basis for the teacher's assessment of the child's intellectual capabilities. The teacher judges his pupils by how well they read, and we find a self-fulfilling prophecy in which past performance determines future expectations.[28] The child constantly presents an intellectual image of himself to the teacher, providing the teacher with an informal, essentially intuitive rating of the child within the particular classroom. The child's performance on formal standardized tests, almost inevitably related to or dependent upon reading skills, is taken by the teacher as further evidence of academic potential, evidence accepted as more conclusive because it is validated by the aura of scientific measurement. To illustrate with case study material, consider the effect of test results on the attitude of this teacher working in a one-room school with Indian pupils of low reading ability.[29] In November, before formal testing, he wrote:

> I have some bright students and I mean it. I have some who are average and I have some that are just plain stupid--let's fact it, you'll find this in <u>any</u> school.

Two months later, after administering a standardized test, his reaction was:

> I have just finished giving all the . . . grades II-VII I.Q. tests--WOW! Now I know why I usually had the feeling of beating my head against the proverbial brick wall! I have out of eight students tested, only one I.Q. over 76!! They're all of the near idiot caliber--God! I was bowled over. Then I figured out their respective M.A.'s and this was just another shock wave!!--even my 13-15 year olds have M.A.'s of 10!! How can you stop from lowering your own bloody standards after reading results like this?

Instead of asking himself what might be wrong with the test for these particular pupils, the teacher let the test results tell him what was

wrong with his pupils. When official standardized scores failed to sustain his more optimistic assessment, his confidence in the ability of his pupils to learn was weakened. Occasionally the situation is reversed and pupils perform better than their teachers anticipate. When this happens, teachers absolve themselves of their error in assessment by applying the curious label of "overachievers" to their pupils.

Learning to read is not a skill which a pupil in school is free to acquire or reject. Even if pupils are not necessarily helped by special programs or concentrated attention to reading instruction, receiving instruction in reading is not optional with the learner. Blind pupils attending public schools are assigned special teachers who instruct them in Braille; nonreaders usually are the targets of an endless barrage of teacher effort and teacher concern. A student who is living with reading failure is apt to find attendance at school an unrewarding experience, and research indicates that reading-disabled pupils show more maladjustment than pupils making normal progress.[30]

I have not meant to suggest seriously that teachers have no effect on the process of learning to read. I do suggest, however, that there is a lack of clear and convincing evidence about the effectiveness of what it is that teachers do in class that contributes to the process of reading. The vast and sometimes frighteningly ambiguous body of research in reading[31] is curiously biased to the study of the teaching of reading rather than to the study of learning to read. Given these limitations, a teacher assumes some risk when he accepts the mantle of expert in reading. Those who have taught about and researched reading most thoroughly are usually the most modest in describing the state of the art. A similar modesty might also serve the classroom teacher. He should be chary of taking (or being assigned) the role of expert in teaching reading, for neither his training nor his classroom successes have provided him with the knowledge sufficient to warrant such expectations.

In the next section, we turn our attention to the actual world of the reading classroom. The discussion and brief vignettes from three classrooms suggest that in the performance of their duties in the reading classroom, teachers appear to be managers of reading more than experts in its instructional aspects.

Classroom reading as a window to the world

Ideally, we think of reading as providing pupils a way to vicariously explore and experience the real world.

In reality, the picture of the real world presented to children through the books available to them in school is a carefully screened one. Martin Mayer's comment, "Hemingway's Old Man and the Sea has been seized on gleefully . . . there is no s-e-x in it"[32] calls attention to only one of many facets of human life purged from the content of classroom reading. The content of those books which filter past the zealous watch of parent censors, wary administrators, and cautious teachers is not threatening to the adults but neither is it exciting reading for the pupils. In this regard the basal readers are often criticized for being the worst of the lot. Mayer gave this candid reaction to the basal readers:[33]

> The books are stupid and dull; despite all the grandiloquent claims to the contrary, they are regarded everywhere simply as "books for learning to read," not as books that anybody who already knows how to read might be interested in looking at. They are written in the flattest and deadest imaginable style, and the conversations in them are embarrassingly unlike the speech of children or adults.

The very dullness of the basal readers does provide one ironical bit of continuity in terms of future schooling. Most textbooks are dull; children have an opportunity to learn this fact through firsthand experience early in their formal education.

Although many aspects of human life are excluded from the content of reading classrooms, certain other aspects are not only allowed but expected in approved children's literature. Patriotism, particularly when treated as an abstraction, is a value considered to be within the domain of public education, and the content of approved literature shows it: "Beginning with fourth grade, the books [basal readers] are full of buncombe, but it is the kind of patriotic buncombe that children like and the schools must provide."[34] The whole American value system as

epitomized in the Protestant Ethic (ambition, resourcefulness, industry, economy, etc.) has been reflected in the content of stories selected for children's readers since long before the first appearance of the highly moralistic McGuffey Readers. David Reisman, in his classic discussion of other-directedness in American life, analyzed the contents of a children's story[35] to suggest the contemporary use of children's literature in socializing the young toward such values as cooperation, self-control, obedience, and conformity to group standards.

The oft-maligned Dick and Jane, however, have taken more than their fair share of criticism for being almost single-handedly the reason for the absence of genuine literature in the classroom. Taken to represent basal readers in general, Dick and Jane are criticized for providing an insipid nonliterature, for representing only the middle class, and for representing un unrealistic picture of American life. As to the first criticism, that they are nonliterature--one can ask: Are they intended to be contributions to literature? The answer is that they are not. They are instructional media based on an hypothesis that learning to read is an accumulation of discrete skills which are best presented in an orderly sequence. The second criticism--that the readers deal exclusively with people and experiences typical of the middle class (and therefore, the argument goes, lower class or ethnically different children cannot identify with the characters or relate their own experiences to the reading material)[36] may be justified, but it tends to lead us to a too-simple conclusion. The problem lies not in the readers themselves, but with the total orientation of public schools to a middle-class way of life. So while it is fashionable to criticize the readers for showing how life is fun in a smiling, fair-skinned world,[37] this argument diverts our attention to the minor faults of the basal readers rather than directs it to an awareness of how <u>everything</u> connected with schooling tends to be middle class. The basal readers are no more middle class than the teachers, the curriculum, the architecture, or the daily time schedule. Basal readers are designed for volume sales. The content is a compromise to wide appeal; the demands of the market preclude the possibility of providing stories and characters with whom all students can identify. Recent attention to introducing multiethnic readers seems to have resulted essentially in substituting one socioeconomic or ethnic class for another.[38]

The point that basal readers portray an unrealistic picture of American life has a leavening footnote. Suppose we accept the criticism that classroom literature provides a carefully screened picture of the real world and recognize that the basal readers epitomize the results of content screening. What kind of picture do they present of American life? Kleinberg posed the question in his critique of the basal readers: What if a visitor from Mars tried to reconstruct a picture of life in America solely from the content of the readers? What kind of picture

would he have? He concluded that the picture would be one of all-white (mostly blonde) happy, friendly Americans, North European in origin, going pleasantly about their work with a minimum of frustration and in a setting peopled by gentle and understanding parents, doting grandparents, cooperative neighbors, and warm-hearted strangers.[39] Certainly the authors of the texts have succeeded in utilizing innocuous content in complying with the educational tradition of avoiding controversy. But the picture that our mythical Martian gets is not at all a haphazard selection of noncontroversial traits and episodes. Rather, the basal readers provide an excellent normative statement of American life: all the nagging problems of the real world are gone--there is no violence, no anger, no hunger or poverty, no sickness, no pollution, no overcrowding; there is leisure time for travel and fun; and, most important to American norms, there is no problem regarding differences because, in the normative world of the readers, the differences themselves are gone. There are no ethnic minorities, there are no lower classes, there are not even any old people except a still-spry set of grandparents keeping up a few acres in the country. A realistic picture, no; a reflection of American norms, definitely. We would only hope our Martian is enough of a social scientist to recognize that the image of American life as presented through basal readers ia a utopian one. While it is not a realistic picture, neither is it random. The basis for the picture is found in the whole cultural milieu, even though only selected aspects are reflected in the carefully filtered picture provided for school pupils.

Fun and work in classroom reading

Ideally, reading is pleasureful. We eulogize its excitement and satisfactions, and books are written telling us how to provide reading experiences for young people that will lead them "one step at a time up the ladder of reading enjoyment."[40] An outsider might be led to believe that the sheer joy of reading, because it is satisfying, motivates further reading. Thus one might assume that the dominant activity in the reading class is pupil reading, and that the only other activity occurs during those moments of instruction when the teacher attempts to improve the specific reading skills of the pupils.

In reality, the reading class, like every other period of the school day, is dominated by a complex work ethic which dictates that because reading is fun--as it is for at least some students--it must be both meted out and, especially, earned.

Classroom reading confronts the work ethic morality with a curious problem. In the work ethic one is ultimately rewarded for his efforts--a man earns his rewards. The sequence itself is important. First the work, then the pleasure that derives from it. The traditional approach to classroom reading reverses this proper order--the pleasure of reading

a story precedes the followup activities which earn it. The reward for classroom reading is almost inevitably some class assignment of a non-reading nature (e.g., writing a book report, completing a fill-in assignment, or in primary grades, drawing a picture about the story). That such activities are work (or the classroom equivalent of it) is reflected in the names of the activities (reading work, workbook, seat work [or, deprecatingly, busy work], meaningful activities, drill and practice exercises) and in the comments one hears from teachers during the reading class ("Have you boys back there finished your reading work?" or "Some children are doing a nice job of reading today").

To avoid the risk of having the pleasure precede the effort, some teachers treat both the reading of a story in a basal reader and the followup assignment as reading work. This work must be completed in order to earn time for fun reading in a book of one's choice or at a special fun reading place within the classroom such as a library table where magazines can be perused without the penalty of a subsequent assignment.

Another related paradox in the reading classroom is the practice of restricting the output of certain kinds of pupil reading. While this phenomenon can occur in any classroom (few teachers can resist the tendency to admonish a student who appears to be doing escape reading in class), it is especially common where teachers use certain classroom reading material for instructional purposes in a sequential program. As one of reading's "high priests" once explained to me, the stories in any sequential series are "like vitamins--they must be taken regularly to do any good, but you don't take them all at once." The adult logic here may be sound, but for the child the logic may be twisted a bit: Here is a book that is supposed to help me learn to read. If I can only read one or two stories a week, learning to read will take forever. If I read it now, I will be a better reader sooner.

As pupils grow older and more competent in their reading, the restriction of reading may result in an awkward struggle between teacher and pupil when an antagonistic pupil reacts to the spoon feeding of stories with a possibly unspoken logic on the part of the pupil that says, "I couldn't read it when I wanted to; now why do you think I will read it when you want me to?"

Practical efforts to get around the problem of meting out developmental reading material encounter difficulties among both pupils and teachers. In using color-coded levels for presenting sequential materials, for example, teachers find that pupils quickly discover which colors are of higher status (harder levels) and race through earlier sequences, thereby, presumably, failing to derive their skill-building benefits, only to find themselves stuck at difficult levels. Result: teachers restrict the number of days pupils have access to the color-coded materials. If teachers eliminate developmental programs and allow pupils to pursue

individualized programs, then they find that pupils may start selecting short and/or easy books in order to quantitatively outread their peers. It is easy for the teacher to restrict that kind of reading: insist on a book report.

The tendency of teachers to manage classroom output in not limited to the teaching of reading. Richard Carlson has reported a case study[41] showing how some teachers managed the introduction of programed instruction, a technique designed specifically to let pupils proceed at their own rates, in such a way that differing rates in the abilities of pupils to complete frames were neutralized by teachers through restricting the output of the faster students, through giving the faster students more enrichment materials, and through allowing only slower students to work on their programs outside of class. As Carlson pointed out, these techniques tend to minimize differences in student performance. From the teacher's point of view, the greater the number of pupils working on the same material, the easier the assignment of tasks and rewards. Every practice that keeps pupils working at the same pace, however, sacrifices differential learning rates to achieve classroom efficiency. In the teaching of a basic skill like reading, the teaching methods for maintaining equality of performance can result in a curious restricting of output for bright pupils and an equally curious subsidizing of effort for slow ones.

The classroom teacher as reading instructor

Ideally, the teacher's role during the reading class is an instructional one concerned primarily with helping pupils improve necessary reading skills.

In reality, while the reading period may well be the busiest one of the classroom teacher's day, the portion of the teacher's efforts immediately related to teaching skills in reading is small compared to the time devoted to the management of the entire class, to time-consuming traditions of the reading class such as motivating the reading of a new story or hearing an entire story read aloud, and to maintaining the traditions of all classrooms (e.g., pursuing quiet, teaching classroom courtesy and cooperation, keeping everyone busy).

The reading classroom is busy for the teacher in part because of the effort required to free time for instructing a few pupils while other pupils carry on independently at tasks sufficient to keep them occupied (intellectually, if possible) without having to interrupt the teacher for assistance or approval. The analogy might be drawn between the teacher during the reading period and an organist playing a giant console intent on keeping every key playing the maximum amount of time. One consequence of a preoccupation with keeping every pupil or key occupied is that the theme or continuity may have to be sacrificed to do

so. Quantity of teacher-pupil interaction is substituted for quality of instruction. Primary teachers, for example, are delighted when they can report after the reading period, "Today I heard <u>everyone</u>."

One of the remarkable things about many teachers during the reading class is the contrast between the kind of concentration they demand of their pupils and their own diffuse attention which seems to allow them to catch anything going on anywhere in the classroom. To illustrate the extent of this diffusion of teacher attention during a reading lesson, consider the following interaction in a reading classroom as recorded by a student observer.[42] The observation is from a second-grade classroom. Notice how the teacher's attention moves constantly among tasks of group instruction, individual instruction, and classroom management.

Observation No. 1: Second Grade

I began my observation at 9:45. The teacher had a group of eight children up in the front reading out of books. Some of the other children were coloring a page of a coloring book assignment at their desks. Others were busying themselves around their desks with workbooks, readers, and arithmetic. The children at the back table were doing a variety of things--reading, talking, or playing games.

The reading group could be heard quite distinctly. The teacher called on several pupils to read aloud from their readers and complimented them as they finished. She also corrected the students' words. Everyone else in the room continued with his activities.

T: Okay, Jimmy

(Jimmy read from his book, several paragraphs which I could not write down, I couldn't write down what they were reading at any time during the hour, so I caught the errors and teacher comments.)

T: That's Fine. Now Marcia.

(Marcia read from the book.)

T: Good. Ginny. (The teacher went around in order in the circle.)

(Ginny read several paragraphs from the story.)

(The reading group broke up and the eight boys and girls took their chairs back to their desks.)

T: Stay in your seat until I call you. I'm not going to call you for a minute. You have some reading to do. (A girl says something to her which I can't hear.)

T: Polly, do you have a pencil that's not yours? (Polly nods.)

Girl: She peeled all the blue off it. (The conflict over who owned the pencil was difficult to hear.)

T: Was it yours? You brought it from home? (Polly nods again.)

(The students talked to each other while the teacher got something from her desk. Several conversations in whispers were going all around the room. The teacher went to cut paper at the back of the room. One little girl walked back and told the teacher something I couldn't hear. She returned to her seat. A little boy walked back to his teacher and showed her his workbook.)

T: There's a little bit too much visiting. If you're visiting, I don't think you're working. (I missed her discourse here as she was walking toward the children's desks.)

Girl: I forgot my book assignment from home. Could I bring it tomorrow? (The teacher nods and smiles.)

T: Would the Sailors go up to the front of the room. (As the boys and girls took their chairs up to the front, the teacher stopped to talk to a girl who has just come back from someplace with a book in her hand. Then she took her chair in the corner of the circle in the room just as she had done with the first reading group.)

T: Fifty-three.

Children: Fifty-three.

T. We haven't read about the little mouse. Will you read it, John.

(The boy read from his book a story about some visiting mice. The teacher asked some questions about the mouse the boy read about. I missed these as she asked quite a few in succession.)

T. What's the mouse's fur like?

Boy: Fuzzie.

T (loudly): Jeff, Mark isn't back there to visit with. (Softly) Steve. (She was talking to a boy in the back of the room doing something wrong, and then she asked Steve to read.)

Steve: (Reading from his book.) Hubert....

T: (correcting his reading) Herbert.

(Steve continued, and a girl came up and showed the teacher an assignment. The teacher nodded her head, and the girl returned to her desk. Next a girl took over reading from the book, and while she was reading a boy brought his workbook up to the teacher. The teacher said something to him about his work, which I could not hear. He left, and another girl began to read about a city mouse and a country mouse.)

Girl: Somethin'.

T: Something. (I missed the next word the girl mispronounced.)

T: What kind of a vowel is in this word? (She wrote H U G on the board. Then she gave a minute dissertation on vowel sounds and "e" on the end of a word making the vowel long. Another boy began to read.)

T: Boys and girls, don't tell the words. These stories have some words we need to figure out ourselves. (Another girl began to read.)

(The same boy as above brought his workbook to the teacher. They talked about a problem very softly, and I couldn't hear over the girl reading. Another girl began to read and the teacher watched her for awhile. That girl began another story. The teacher now had two boys lined up with workbook problems. Boy number three read, while the first boy asked the teacher a question. Some children in the classrooms were working on workbooks at their desks as others wandered around the room or played games.)

T: Marshall. (She was asking him to get busy at something.)

T: Ann, you have your other workbook to do.

(At the reading group, Steve was reading again, and the teacher was looking at her book.)

Steve: Tellie.

T: Tillie.

Steve: (Continuing to read.) Dey all....

T: They all.

Steve: Mrs. Tabor

T: Mrs. Toliver.

Steve: (Continues reading.) Tissie.

T: Tessie.

(A fourth girl began to read. The teacher looked around the room. A girl from outside the group brought up her arithmetic assignment to the teacher. After her question was answered, she returned to her seat.)

Girl: I ever.

T: I never, Mrs. Toliver declared.

Girl: All the travelers.

T: All the Tolivers.

(This girl finished the story, and the children closed their books.)

T: (To the reading group) Let's get your papers from yesterday out. Those playing checkers are fine. The rest of you, let's get something to do. (This was directed to those outside the group.)

(Those outside the group moved toward their seats, opened their books or workbooks, and whispered some. The reading group did a dittoed exercise.)

T: Mark, take that game back. I've talked to you too many times this morning. (I missed the next part of discipling Mark. He had been wandering around the room.)

T: How about a puzzle or something to work at your desk. (Pause while Mark looked around.) Hurry, I'm waiting.

If learning is proportional to the time and emphasis given by the teacher, then the reading period in this classroom serves as a vehicle for teaching many lessons, most of which are more concerned with classroom behavior than with reading behavior. The actual role of the teacher in this example provides little opportunity for or evidence of the teacher acting as an instructor unless the teaching of reading is as simple as naming the words a child cannot read. Yet the reading period is a busy one for this teacher, and she demonstrates some success in keeping the period a busy one for pupils. There is a great deal of skill required to keep children in a classroom occupied, but the skill is of a different order from expertise in teaching about vowel sounds, dipthongs, or initial consonent blends.

Learning to 'Learn to Read'

Ideally, what the teacher intends for the pupil to learn in the reading lesson, as in any lesson, is what the learner actually learns.

In reality, the lesson as the teacher intends it is never exactly the same as the lesson perceived by the learner. A learner perceives many simultaneous lessons at once. Some of these lessons are intended by the teacher; others are not.

It seems improbable that human learning is ever restricted to learning one thing at a time. It has been observed that American teachers emphasize and even exploit opportunities for teaching multifaceted lessons,[43] as, for example, when a pupil's oral book report to his classmates simultaneously provides the teacher with an opportunity to teach the love of books, how to summarize, how to take one's turn, how to speak in front of the class, and, for the other pupils, how to be good listeners. This tendency to utilize many teachable aspects of a lesson may have the unintended effect of diffusing the attention of the pupils and drawing their attention away from the central purpose of a lesson.

In addition to this tendency of teachers to exploit lessons, there are other consequences of lessons of which teachers may be unaware or which may be antithetical to the goals they wish to achieve.[44] This paper concludes with a discussion of five potential unintended consequences of the teacher's efforts in the reading classroom.

The beginning-to-read sound syndrome. Children who are beginning to read exhibit a pronounced and unique intonation pattern in their oral reading. It is characterized by the practice of using a constant pitch, tone, and stress in reading aloud every word in the sentence; each word is treated exactly like every other word: The result is a reading monotone sound syndrome characteristic of many children when they first learn to read. Once he is over the hurdle of beginning-to-read, the pupil may be chastised for the next several grades for not "reading with expression." In the process of learning to read, many children pass through this unintended stage.

Children who are not yet able to read may nonetheless have learned this peculiar intonation pattern and may imitate it both in the classroom and in playing school. The sound pattern is not only associated with beginning reading but actually precedes the naming of real words. As the child acquires an initial sight-reading vocabulary, real words are substituted for the sounds which a child uses to make his "like-reading" sentences. Two questions are posed here for further research. First, how universal is this phenomenon of the beginning-to-read sound syndrome (teachers and parents have corroborated my observation, but I do not believe it has been systematically researched)?[45] Second, how is

this sound pattern transmitted? Does the teacher inadvertantly teach the pattern, even, perhaps, while lamenting that beginning pupils always read with such a monotone, or do pupils transmit it themselves (in neighborhood play, to younger siblings, among peers at school)? Or is the pattern a natural consequence of the monosyllabic vocabularies which characterize most beginning reading programs? In any case, acquiring the monotone syndrome is not an intended consequence of reading instruction; apparently it has never been systematically studied as a facet of learning to read and a possible unintended consequence of formal instruction. We simply take for granted that if a child is to become more than a word-by-word reader, this reading behavior must eventually be unlearned.

Learning and unlearning the "sounds" of letters. A second example of unintended consequences in the reading lesson is the inordinate amount of unlearning necessary in most beginning reading programs. Like any complex process, learning to read requires a learner to unlearn incorrect responses and generalizations as well as to learn correct ones. The human being beginning to read grapples with a seemingly capricious relationship between spoken sounds and the printed letters (especially the vowels) which we use to symbolize them. There is no single, direct step by which a beginner advances from "major" to "colonel" in learning to read.

One of the unintended consequences of most traditional programs for teaching beginning reading is that in selecting the short, simple, high-frequency words characteristic of the reading primers, inadequate attention has been given to the consequences of confronting the learner with stimuli which have constantly changing attributes. Instead of being able to generalize from what he has previously learned so that he can discover for himself the relationship between sounds and letters, the beginner is presented with words that require a high ratio of unlearning to learning. What, for example, does a child learn about the sound of a when he is taught to read with words like Sally, Jane, are, and ball? The learner may come to the conclusion, quite unintended by the teacher, that the learning of every word must be a discrete event. Recognition of this problem is of primary importance in the linguistically-informed approaches to teaching reading.[46] In these approaches reading instruction is initiated either through presenting words in which a letter always symbolizes the same sound or through using a modified alphabet like the Initial Teaching Alphabet (i/t/a). Central to these approaches to teaching reading is the principle of presenting and consistently reinforcing only one sound for each letter or symbol. In spite of many variations in name and technique, these approaches all share an attempt to maximize the regularity that exists in the relationship between sounds and letters and to minimize the unsystematic aspects of this relationship.

The narrow classroom conception of reading. The work-ethic context in which reading takes place at school can lead children to have a very restricted expectation regarding appropriate tasks for the reading classroom. At the extreme, one finds pupils so accustomed to receiving a routine assignment to 1) read a story in a basal reader and 2) complete a subsequent reading-work task, that any variation in this procedure is considered as nonreading, even if the nonreading activity is reading a book of one's own choice completely free from any subsequent assignment. Thus the reading classroom may come to be associated with the narrowest expectation of what constitutes reading rather than with the wide context in which adult reading may take place.

One of the older pupils I once taught in a one-room school on an Indian reserve in British Columbia provides an example of a student who had been conditioned by years of the reader-and-workbook approach. Working at her assigned grade level was essential for this fifteen-year-old girl in order for her to maintain her image of herself as an eighth grader, and the markings on the basal reader series clearly indicated which book was the eighth-grade one. Yet neither her experience nor her language background provided her with the skills essential for coping with a difficult and pedantic reader series. I was not able to extend very far her concept of what a pupil might do that was appropriate to the reading period at school:

> Although she read many library books of her own choosing during the year, I was never able to convince her that reading books which she enjoyed was a preferable alternative to "doing reading" which, to her, meant sitting at her desk staring into space while a reader and accompanying workbook whose vocabularies were almost infinitely beyond her remained open but ignored.[47]

While not all pupils have as narrow a concept of classroom reading as this girl had, classroom reading does not reflect the variety of skills, content, or purposes found in adult reading. The pupil who finds success in classroom reading will apply his reading skill in a far wider spectrum if he is going to be an adult reader as well. The pupil who learns in school that he is a poor reader may be able to overcome his school-learned self-concept and find some reward in adult reading simply because it is not like classroom reading, but it is as likely that he will totally eschew reading because of the kind of reading to which he was exposed in school. The suggestion here is that the child who goes on to be an adult reader may do so in spite of, rather than because of, the reading experiences of the classroom. This is hardly the intent of the teacher.

Reading as a time of pupil dependence. Because reading is such a uniquely individual activity, it would seem to lend itself to pupil

independence. The whole purpose of reading instruction is, after all, to develop the pupil's own reading skills so that he can attack new words independently. Much is made of independent reading habits and of providing pupils with independent seat work.

A critical examination of what actually goes on in the classroom reveals that while independence may be a stated objective of the reading program, the organization of the classroom typically generates dependence instead. The factors which contribute to this unintended consequence are in part due to the very nature of classroom instruction. For example, one learns independence most quickly if needed skills can be acquired at some optimum moment. Even if we could provide one teacher for each pupil, however, the teacher would still need constant feedback to ascertain how his pupil is doing. As the number of pupils increases, the teacher's estimate of an appropriate level of difficulty is more likely to be a compromise between assignments too easy for some pupils and too difficult for others. Too-difficult assignments lead to greater pupil need for help. Too-easy assignments lead to other classroom problems for the teacher, problems both of pupil output and of pupil behavior; and teacher dominance in either aspect leads back to dependence on the teacher. Attention was directed earlier to the problem of teacher restriction of output of the faster pupils. In that case, the independence of the pupil in coping with the instructional material is ultimately made dependent on how fast the teacher allows the pupil to proceed.

For slower readers, the sometimes extreme dependence of a pupil may relate directly to the difficulty of the reading task itself. A pupil who cannot read a word he needs has to have help either before or after attempting to identify it if he is going to proceed to the next word with any confidence. At the crucial moment of needing assistance to read a word, to when a pupil turns for help and how the help is given presents an interesting observation. In a classroom in which the teacher is not perceived as a friend and helper, pupils turn to their peers for help, and the nature and degree of peer help may deliberately block the possibility of the teacher's making an accurate estimate of the pupil's ability or the amount of assistance he needs.[48]

When the teacher is accepted by his pupils as a source of help, or in classrooms where teachers attempt to maintain control by making themselves the only sanctioned source of help, there is apt to be a steady procession of pupils seeking the teacher's assistance. Teachers rationalize that they should do the helping for many reasons: to minimize distractions for other pupils, to provide feedback to the teacher on the kind of help pupils need, to control the amount of help given so that students will be forced (?) to become more independent, and to restrict help to that given by the teacher because he is able to give assistance in a more constructive way. Whatever the rationale, the actual help-

giving behavior of teachers may do no more for the pupil than make him totally dependent on the teacher both for the present and for the future. In the following excerpts from a protocol made in a first-grade classroom, note how constant and complete are the cues which the teacher gives to the pupils, whether they are getting help in oral reading, listening for consonant sounds, or doing independent workbook assignments.

Observation No. 2: First Grade

The class has been instructed to begin oral reading. Pupil 7 is reading with trouble, 5 and 6 go over to help.

T: Here boys, I'll help him.

7: (reading) Go...

T: (whispers) and

7: and...

T: (whispers) help

7: help...

T: (whispers) Susan

7: Susan

T: O.K. Who's next? Who was the last "Tom?" Have you read yet, Eric?

6: Uhn, uh. [No]

T: Will you read the next "Tom" part?

6: (reading) Tom said, Come Susan. You have a bunny. Come, Susan. We want to.....

T: to go

6: We want to go.

T: O.K. Roy, won't you read the next one? Will you read Betty's part?

10: Look Susan, here is...(observer missed the rest).

T: All right, now I want you to listen very carefully. I want you to listen to all the words I say that sound like "little." I want you

to listen for all those words that have the same sound. Let's leave the letter for the lady.

(Kids shout out answers faster than observer could number them.)

Many kids: Let's...
Leave...

T: O.K. I'll read it again. Let's leave the letter...for...the... lady. Letter...Lady...Listen for the next one. Linda liked wooley lambs a lot. Remember, it's for the sound of "little."

(Again, many answers. Every word is repeated, including "wooley.")

T: Please!! Listen!! What sounds started with 'L?' Listen? Leave?

5: Lambs

9: Liked

T: Listen again. (Something about a caged lion is said.)

4: What's a cage?

T: "Last" is the one.

T: Let's see if you can think of a word in this sentence. Listen... The opposite of found is...? (No response.) Instead of finding something you...?

9: Take?

5: Finders keepers, losers weepers.

Many kids: Lose!

T: But, the opposite of found is...? Instead of finding something you lose it. Eric, will you sit down, please! The opposite of dark is ...?

5: Light

T: The opposite of short is...

5: Long

T: The opposite of men is...

2: Girls?

T: O.K. Will you return to your own desks and take out pencils and workbooks, please.

11: I can't find my workbook.

6: What page?

T: Page 74.

(They begin working and mumbling--a low rumble. Pupils circulate around--go up to teacher to ask questions.)

T: If you want to get page 74 and 75 done, I'll be real happy.

(Teacher walks around looking at workbooks.)

The reading classroom as a plot against reading. Finally, in exploring the unintended consequences of the reading classroom, let us consider how the teacher's activities may preclude reading rather than nurture it. We have already described some procedures in the classroom that work against reading, such as the restriction of output for faster readers and the restriction of the scope of material which is acceptable as reading. There are additional ways in which teachers reduce the amount of reading that is done in the reading period. Two examples of these plots against reading are the use of nonreading assignments and teacher talk.

By nonreading assignments we mean those followup activities assigned in the reading period which often require or develop other skills but which minimize or ignore reading. We have discussed this problem earlier in relation to the effect of work-ethic on reading. If reading is pleasurable, it must be earned by some activity requiring industry. Because reading effort is difficult to assess directly, the related activity must be one where there is a produce by which to evaluate pupil performance. Thus classroom reading leads inevitably to nonreading tasks. At the extreme, it is often reading itself that is excluded from the reading classroom, and we find teacher and pupil attention diverted to making puppets to act out stories, to doing and correcting word puzzles and worksheets, or to debating about the standards for giving an oral book report.

Teacher talk is a more subtle plot against reading, in part because we expect teachers to talk in class and in part because we tend not to discriminate pupil reading from teacher talk about reading. Teacher talk is actually institutionalized as part of the formal reading lesson, both in motivating stories and in explaining followup assignments.[49]

Reading is, however, a quiet, individual activity. Talk precludes reading, particularly if it is directed at the reader. As the previously quoted protocols have shown, the quantity of teacher talk in class is not necessarily diminished during the reading period. Excessive teacher talk can follow several patterns. Many teachers do their greatest amount of talking in their attempts to maintain pupil quiet during reading periods. Some teachers have the habit of making a comment of praise every time a pupil completes a turn at oral reading, although it is reasonable to assume that a pupil who has just read correctly realizes he has done so without an invariable comment from the teacher. Other teachers repeat each sentence or even reread aloud the entire selection that a pupil has just read.

One of my students observing a primary classroom during a reading lesson attempted to record all the comments made by the teacher. Although neither pupil comments nor pupil reading were recorded in the notes he took, the extent of teacher talk is so great that one can literally reconstruct the lesson from teacher talk alone. Such extensive talking on the teacher's part is probably not atypical; it is quite likely that most teachers talk more than is necessary for the activity at hand and that they talk far more than they are aware.

Observation No. 3: First Grade

Method of observation: I attempted to copy word for word what Miss H said. Only teacher comments are recorded. I entered the room while class was in session.

T: "Ride, Bunny."
Do you recall this word? - Ride?
"Bunny, Bunny,"
That's very nice John; keep reading.
That's very...Let's turn to the list of words.

No that's--okay.
All right.
Next row, John.
And the last word--fine.
You go back to your desk, I want to talk to Mark about some words.
John, you'd better take care of your work.
Mark, do you know <u>this</u> letter?
Mark, do you know <u>this</u> letter?
Mark, do you know <u>this</u> letter?
Those letters make Tom's name.

He likes to read--third letter r-i-<u>d</u>-e.
Those letters, r-i-d-e, together make <u>ride</u>.

What's the name of the boy? Uhhuh [yes] .
What does he do?
Mark, what does Tom like to do? Right!

When we look at this word, what does it mean?

Let's see if we can read a little bit more about Tom and ride. What does this sentence mean?

What is it, Ann?
Let's be looking at these words, Mark.
Good.
Read it again, Mark--Good.
Remember the name of the boy?
Very nice, Mark.
That's how we do our reading.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper has been to explore reading in the total cultural milieu and to identify how reading behavior reflects that milieu both in normative aspects and in actual behavior. Reading has been examined first as a cultural phenomenon in American society, then as it relates more specifically to teacher behavior, and finally as it is taught and learned in the classroom.

Two major themes have been emphasized here which are of immediate concern to the teacher of reading. One theme is that reading, as an aspect of culture, is intricately involved with the culture. We see this reflected in what we read, where and when we read, and even in how we read. Our society emphasizes speed and efficiency, for example, and these two values are reflected in how we proceed in the reading classroom. The second theme is that reading is strongly associated with normative ideas of <u>should</u> and <u>ought</u>. Reading is something we feel there should be more of--particularly for other people, and especially for the young.

While the teacher cannot eliminate all the paradoxes between ideal and real reading behavior, the analysis presented here may suggest how in some ways the teacher unintentionally works against the accomplishment of the very objectives he seeks to realize. While the teacher cannot do anything about the tendency of the public or of his colleagues to overreport the amount of reading they do (although the overreporting tendency would be an interesting phenomenon to discuss with a class), he can analyze those practices in his own classroom which either facilitate or minimize the amount of reading his pupils do. He can examine his own attitudes about reading. He can make explicit for himself how he regards classroom reading (fun? work? skill-building? means or end?), whether the organization of his reading program helps him to accomplish his purposes, and whether he achieves or even fosters some unintended and perhaps undesirable consequences as well. That there are discrepancies between the ideal world of reading and the real world of reading is a social fact which need not cause the teacher anxiety. We do assume, however, that the reading teacher may want to be conscious of these discrepancies and aware of how they reflect broader aspects of

culture. To the extent that his behavior as a teacher may thwart the very purposes he wishes to achieve with his pupils, then the teacher may wish to take an analytical look at his own behavior and ask of himself: What are my pupils learning about reading in this classroom? Is that what I want to teach them?

44

NOTES

1. Stuart Chase. American Credos, New York, Harper and Brothers, 1962, 134-35.

2. Chase. American Credos, 135.

3. Chase. American Credos, 134.

4. Elmo Roper. "How Culturally Active Are Americans?" Saturday Review, May 14, 1966, 22.

5. Roper. "How Culturally Active Are Americans?" 23.

6. Jan Hijda. "A Time for Reading," Trans-action, Vol. 4, No. 7, June 1967, 46.

7. Chase. American Credos, 196.

8. Chase. American Credos, 136.

9. Joseph Wood Krutch. "Man is More than a Statistic," Saturday Review, May 21, 1966, 14.

10. Frustrating as the arguments of the censors are to those who oppose censorship, an even more frustrating situation occasionally arises when a community goes on a rampage against certain books in public schools or libraries that members of the cummunity have not themselves read.

11. James S. Coleman. Community Conflict, Glencoe, The Free Press. (Mimeograph published by the Bureau of Applied Social Research, Columbia University, n.d.) 10p. See also Robert Shaplen, "Scarsdale's Battle of the Books," Commentary, December 1950, 530-40.

12. John Henry Merryman. "The Fear of Books," Stanford Today, Series I, No. 17, Autumn, 1966, 15.

13. David K. Berninghausen and Richard W. Faunce. "An Exploratory Study of Juvenile Delinquency and the Reading of Sensational Books," Journal of Experimental Education, Vol. 33, Winter 1964, 161-68.

14. Merryman. "The Fear of Books," 14.

15. Hajda. "A Time for Reading," 45.

16. Roper. "How Culturally Active are Americans?" 22.

17. Jules Henry. "Culture, Education, and Communications Theory," Education and Anthropology, George D. Spindler, Ed. Palo Alto, Stanford University Press, 1955, 201.

18. Krutch. "Man is More than a Statistic," 14.

19. NEA Research Division. "Reading and Recreational Interests of Classroom Teachers," Research Report 1967-R2, National Education Association, 1967.

20. Walter A. Graves. "Teacher's Reading and Recreational Interests," NEA Journal, Vol. 55, No. 8, November 1966, 17-19.

21. NEA Research Division. "Reading and Recreational Interests of Classroom Teachers," 9, 10, 17.

22. Graves, "Teachers' Reading and Recreational Interests," 17-19.

23. Editorial, Phi Delta Kappan, December 1966, 137.

24. In this regard see also Ralph C. Preston. "Reading Achievement of German and American Children," School and Society, Vol. 90, October 20, 1962, 350-54.

25. Martin P. Mayer. The Schools, New York, Harper and Brothers, 1961. (Anchor Books edition, 1963, 204.

26. The student from whose paper I extracted these questions had received full credit for the following answer to this question: "They aid in learning to say new words. They should be used as a part of other methods to teach reading, thus maintaining a balanced approach." In discussing his reaction to the reading methods course and to this test the student said to me, "To tell you the truth, I didn't just get a whole lot out of that course. I got a D on this particular quiz, which was on a phonics book. Needless to say, I didn't read it." [Needless to say, this student was not considered the most promising candidate in his teacher-training program, either.]

27. J. M. Stephens, arguing his "theory of spontaneous schooling," observes, "By the sheer act of calling attention to a certain class of items and by implying that pupils should know such items, the school can induce some growth....Not all the observed growth can be attributed to the detailed process of instruction." J. M. Stephens. The Process of Schooling, New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967, 52.

28. The relationship between teachers' preconceived ideas of the intellectual ability of their pupils and actual pupil performance is explored in Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson. Pygmalion in the Classroom, New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968.

29. Harry F. Wolcott. A Kwakiutl Village and School, New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967, 90-91.

30. Bruce Balow. "The Emotionally and Socially Handicapped," Review of Educational Research, Vol. 36, No. 1, February 1966, 124.

31. Russell and Fea cite W. W. Gray's 1960 estimate of 4,000 careful, scientific studies of the sociology, psychology, and teaching of reading and suggest that the additional interpretive and descriptive writings would "at least double" that figure. David H. Russell and Henry R. Fea. "Research on Teaching Reading," Handbook of Research on Teaching, N. L. Gage, Ed. Chicago, Rand McNally and Company, 1963, 865. The lack of conclusiveness about teaching beginning reading is reflected in the title of a recent analysis of that particular aspect of the research literature, Learning to Read: The Great Debate by Jeanne S. Chall (McGraw-Hill, 1967).

32. Mayer. The Schools, 233.

33. Mayer. The Schools, 212.

34. Mayer. The Schools, 212.

35. David Reisman. "Tootle: A Modern Cautionary Tale," The Lonely Crowd, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1950. Doubleday Anchor edition, 128-31.

36. Marilyn Collier. "An Evaluation of Multi-Ethnic Basal Readers," Elementary English, Vol. 44, No. 2, February 1967, 152-57.

37. Otto Klineberg. "Life is Fun in a Smiling, Fair-Skinned World," Saturday Review, February 16, 1963, 75-77.

38. Collier. "An Evaluation of Multi-Ethnic Basal Readers."

39. Kleinberg. "Life is Fun in a Smiling, Fair-Skinned World."

40. G. Robert Carlsen. Books and the Teen-age Readers, New York, Bantam Books, 1967, 5.

41. Richard O. Carlson. "Unanticipated Consequences in the Use of Programmed Instruction," Adoption of Educational Innovations, Chapter 6. University of Oregon--Center for the Advanced Study of Educational Administration, 1965.

42. These observation notes, and the two which follow it, were chosen from classroom protocols submitted by university students for a class taught by the writer. The classrooms in which the notes were made were not demonstration classrooms, and teachers did not have advance notice that an observer would be visiting during a specific lesson. The three vignettes were chosen because they illustrate the points being developed. They were not selected randomly, and perhaps they are not representative; however, the excerpts used are presented exactly as recorded by the student observers.

43. Henry. "Culture, Education, and Communications Theory," 197.

44. Attention has been drawn to the unintended consequences of instruction by two anthropologists interested in the study of American education, Jules Henry and George Spindler. References to their writings are included at the end of the paper. See also references to an article by Dorothy Lee and to an article by the author, "Concomitant Learning: An Anthropological Perspective on the Utilization of Media."

45. The broader subject of intonation patterns, of which this one peculiar pattern is part, has been a subject of study. See, for example, Noam Chomsky and Morris Halle. The Sound Pattern of English, New York, Harper and Row, 1968, as well as a discussion of that book in relation to problems of beginning reading and research in reading in a review appearing in the Harvard Educational Review, Winter 1969, by John W. MacDonald. See also "Reading: Intonation and Punctuation," Education, Vol 87, 1967, 525-30, by Carl A. Lefevre. Rose-Marie Weber, Department of Linguistics, McGill University, is one, and perhaps the only, person who has dealt specifically with the syndrome described here in a brief unpublished paper, "Studies in Awful Reading II: The Reading Style of First Graders." Note also her more comprehensive review, "The Study of Oral Reading Errors: A Survey of the Literature," Reading Research Quarterly, Vol. 4, 1968, 98-119.

46. Two major contributions describing linguistic approaches to the organization of reading instruction are Leonard Bloomfield and

Clarence L. Barnhart. Let's Read: A Linguistic Approach, Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1961; and Charles C. Fries, et al. Merrill Linguistic Readers, New York, Charles E. Merrill Books, Inc., 1966. Further references may be found in Robert L. Hillerick. "Linguistic Efforts in Reading: An Appraisal," The National Elementary School Principal, Vol. 48, September 1968, 36-43, and Yetta M. Goodman and Kenneth S. Goodman. "References on Linguistics and the Teaching of Reading," The Reading Teacher, 21, 1967.

47. Wolcott. A Kwakiutl Village and School, 15.

48. Harry F. Wolcott. "The Teacher as an Enemy," Education and Cultural Process: Approaches to an Anthropology of Education, George D. Spindler, Ed. New York, Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971.

49. In her analysis of the teacher's manual accompanying one widely used beginning reader, Chall found that a teacher who dutifully followed the manual in guiding the pupil's reading of a story would ask one question for every seven words read by a pupil. Jeanne S. Chall. Learning to Read: The Great Debate, New York, McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967, 253 p.

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A REACTION TO
AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE
OF READING
from Harold Klein
University of Saskatchewan

and
A REJOINDER
by Dr. Wolcott

1972

ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading
200 Pine Hall
Indiana University
Bloomington, Indiana 47401

This paper is a reaction to another paper published
by ERIC/CRIER:
THE IDEAL WORLD AND THE REAL WORLD OF READING:
AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE
by Harry F. Wolcott

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from Harold Klein

A REACTION TO AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE OF READING

An Anthropological Perspective of Reading attempts to help teachers identify, describe, and analyze paradoxes in reading related to the American culture. Specifically the author's plan is to explore paradoxes in the area of reading by contrasting ideal reading behavior based on cultural expectations to reality, using normative reading behavior as described in the literature or obtained through direct observations. Two theses emerge from the paper: reading is an aspect of culture, and reading is associated with normative ideas of should and ought.

Ideally this paper should be breaking ground--investigating how reading fits into the culture. The reality of the piece is a Flesch-type exposé. The actual presentation is a catalogue of ideal and real behavior erected within a framework of middle-class biases which may or may not represent the American culture. Is the author an outsider looking in on the field of reading or an insider simply looking about and trying to use a perceptual mode he has not quite tamed? Despite a reasonably respectable bibliography, references in the body of the paper tend to be amassed from popular periodicals and sources outside the field of anthropology.

The manuscript consists of three sections: Reading and the Cultural Milieu, Teachers and Reading, and The Reading Class; these are further subdivided into four parts each, with the last part subdivided again into five additional parts. The outline appears to be logical, but it is also sufficiently comprehensive to fill a book rather than a modest-sized paper. Indeed, any section could be expanded to form a chapter of some merit and consequence, and perhaps each should have been.

All parts are introduced with an ideal behavior statement representing the cultural expectations of America. Kluckhohn is given credit for developing the dichotomy used in the paper to provide a way of looking at behavior; however, the final result tends to oversimplify Kluckhohn's analysis of ideal and real, because Kluckhohn (1959) concluded that not all ideal patterns define only one acceptable means of meeting a given situation in a culture; instead, they represent several procedures or alternatives a society adapts, ranging from compulsory for all to restricted to a few.

The first ideal statement met in the paper declares, "Ideally, Americans think of themselves not only as a highly literate nation of people who can read, but also as a nation of people who do read. Indeed, Americans probably think of theirs as the greatest reading nation in the world." This means that ideally Americans regard themselves as 1) highly literate, 2) able to read, 3) willing to read, 4) readers, 5) readers without peer in the world. But reality should be balanced against ideal. There is no real evidence presented which indicates that Americans are or are not highly literate, able to read, willing to read, or, for that matter, readers and readers without peer. This is so because evidence defining real behavior is confined to the number of books read. Yet there is no suggestion in the statement above that reading and reading books are synonymous. Admittedly book reading may epitomize literacy, but is is a very narrow concept of what reading is. Can Americans read books? If they are literate, they can, but why don't they? Once it was determined that many Americans do not read books, the matter was pursued no further. No attempt was made to show how much reading Americans do daily, how much time they devote to reading, or how they really feel about reading.

While polls can be a major source of information, the information that polls provide is denigrated in such a way as to minimize any finding that moves ideal and real closer together. Polls are shown to have inherent inaccuracies. People conform to the culture and appear to "overreport," favoring expected behavior. A major point the author is making in this report is that despite a universal expectation of good reading and much reading, the reality is that nothing is happening that even closely approximates this expectation. He does not speculate that innovations such as TV, affluence, mobility, and the pill have created a cultural lag? Perhaps the paradoxes between ideal and real have more meaning than is assigned to them.

Unfortunately the paper goes over ground long trod by critics, using, as an example, classroom transcripts. Ironically, though this is an anthropological paper, the author introduces a set of transcripts, noting that they were not randomly selected but were incorporated into the text to make a point. Perhaps scientists "in reality" do this, but "ideally" we, who are less sophisticated, hope they do not select data in order to arrive at predetermined conclusions.

Equally questionable is analogously relating some case study material dealing with Indians to the American culture. One example is used to illustrate the effect test knowledge has on teachers. Letters are cited which were written two months apart by a teacher of Indian children with low reading ability. The teacher (presumedly young) let the test results tell him what was wrong with his pupils. In the first letter, the teacher was optimistic, "I have some bright students and I mean it." but he admitted to having a few "that are just plain stupid" and

"some who are average." When the writer discovered that the highest IQ was 76, he was distraught--which probably prompted the second letter. In it he reasoned, "Now I know why I usually had the feeling of beating my head against the proverbial brick wall." This is perhaps the key sentence, because if the individual had kept a daily diary, it probably would have shown his mounting frustration. Unfortunately, we do not know the strategies used by the teacher to promote learning, if and how he incorporated diagnostic procedures in his lessons, how he utilized materials, and whether they were appropriate for Indians.

The author chides teachers who let test results tell them what is wrong with their pupils (as undesirable as a doctor letting an X-ray tell him what is wrong with his patient, or a football coach letting a film tell him what is wrong with his team). The greater deception may have been that the lad believed the children were bright and average like "in any school." Consequently, he was probably teaching them as if he were in Vancouver or Seattle. He was doubtlessly out of cultural contact, not mentioned by the author. He was also ignoring or initially was oblivious to the limited ability of these students to learn the content of a "foreign" culture. Perhaps if the shock had come sooner, he might have been instructing them according to need and level, assuming he had been taught how and could organize his program based on the scientific data he had available or could command. Indians are associated with "pygmalions in the classroom," but Northwestern Indians are not 'pygmalions.' They are isolated rural children from another culture who have low IQ's in terms of the prevailing cultural norms. They usually are being prepared by a Caucasian, rightly or wrongly, to fit into the dominant society and must measure up or opt out.[1] Because the input and output behaviors are different, the requisite programing for Indians should be an amalgam of normal, slow, and unique. The anthropologist should be able to tell us more about how, because he has (or should have) provided a base of who, what, where, when, and why. Such information is far more critical than the direction provided by this paper.

Had the manuscript been written in this decade it could not have ignored the "Right to Read" program and its genesis; it would have had to report the evolution of basal reader content; also, it would have had to ponder "continuous progress," amongst other recent innovations.

The "Right to Read" program affords ample evidence that the ideal/real dichotomy exists as the author describes it. The culture dictates that Americans should learn to read and have every opportunity to learn to read to their potential. Advocates of the program suggest that something is wrong with instruction and that something can be done to improve instruction. Certainly this is developed by the paper.

"Right to Read" is predicated on the expectation of what ought to be. It proposes that Americans must be literate and defines the optimum level of literacy. Being an American innovation, it is an integral part of the American personality. For example, an anthropologist heard on CBC Radio recently observed that Americans have a culturally inspired rebellious nature causing many to fight things they ought to do, which possibly includes reading. Clearly, generalizations drawn from limited research and data about 200 million people are dangerous, particularly if they give rise to easy solutions for complex problems.

The significance of anthropology according to Bohannan (1963) is:

1) It attempts to question some of the most basic ideas of the contemporary world.

2) It brings comparative insight to bear on these ideas.

3) It makes us more aware of what we are by confronting us with what we are not.

The major fault of the manuscript, which attempted to sort out patterns of culture related to reading is that the expectancy for the paper is not met by the realities of the content. Instead of being a mirror, the paper could have opened windows, but it did not. The concept of the paper using ideal and real behavior to set up paradoxes is astute, but there is a greater need to provide anthropological information showing how variations are accommodated and what ranges of adaptations are permitted. Of great concern to the educator is how the culture affects individuals who do not conform. Kluckhohn (1950) has described situations through which anthropologists have assisted business, government, and the armed forces in developing guidelines for action to solve problems caused by misunderstandings. Should not educators expect similar insights from this paper? One looks in vain for them.

Note

1. An interesting sidelight is that a Canadian researcher is looking into the low IQ of Indians. He has compared Indian children to institutionalized Caucasians with similar IQ's and has found some very significant differences related to learning abilities of Indians, showing them to be similar to normals. (Josef Schubert, "The Development of Reflective Verbal Thinking in Two Groups of Indian School Children." Paper presented at the meeting of the Saskatchewan Education Research Association, Regina, October 1971.)

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by Harry F. Wolcott

A REJOINDER to Dr. Klein

I heartily agree with the reviewer that the Right to Read program is predicated on the expectation of what ought to be. Since he has patiently pointed out many of the shortcomings of the paper, allow me to lend emphasis to the one concept that I hope constitutes its major strength: reading reflects culture, and American attitudes carry a heavy loading of normative feelings about the goodness and "shouldness" of reading.

The Right to Read program disguises as a right what the schools hold to be their clearest mandate in the formal training of the young: They Shall Read! To truly be a Right, the program would have had to guarantee that under no circumstances would children in school be forced or required to attend to reading. In terms of civil liberties, perhaps we would be justified in making just such a guarantee. But in terms of what we feel to be in the best interests of children, we recognize how very strongly we feel that they should, and must, read. I hope it is useful for teachers to understand how strongly this feeling permeates their own professional belief system. I believe that teacher failures, in terms of pupils who do not read well, contribute considerably to professional anxiety and frustration, and I hope that this attempt at looking at their behavior in cultural terms serves to make teachers aware in a way that contributes to their effectiveness and understanding of themselves as teachers, as people, and as members of a "reading" society.

Even if it is a bit too simple a dichotomy, the contrast between the real world and the ideal world of reading as presented here has seemed to serve in a provocative way for classroom teachers, and I would point out that the paper was prepared especially for teachers. In earlier drafts I included extensive protocol materials, but my teacher-readers assured me they had gotten the point long before I had ceased to belabor it. I drew upon protocols to illustrate ideas, not to prove them and certainly not to quantify them. Those tasks are a different order of business than the descriptive and "pattern-seeking" purposes undertaken here.

One of the intriguing questions that continues to plague me is how to go about accumulating accurate evidence about "real" reading behavior in American society without inadvertently tripping the avalanche of associated "should" feelings, especially among people who have had a long exposure to school and for whom the exposure "took." Thus I readily admit to being caught red-handed with not knowing much about "real" reading habits in American society. I will go one step farther--I am still not sure how to go about getting that information. I will be interested when field-oriented researchers can tell us more about our actual reading behavior, just as I hope other researchers may be interested in making a more systematic inquiry into the normative dimensions of attitudes about reading. Meanwhile, each classroom teacher is invited to analyze for himself how his attitudes about reading, his personal reading habits, and his behavior as a teacher of reading reflect the influence and interplay of cultural forces in his society.

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